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THE
PRODIGAL SON.

DUTCHER.

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TO THE
MEMBERS OF MY PASTORAL CHARGES,
THIS VOLUME
IS
AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

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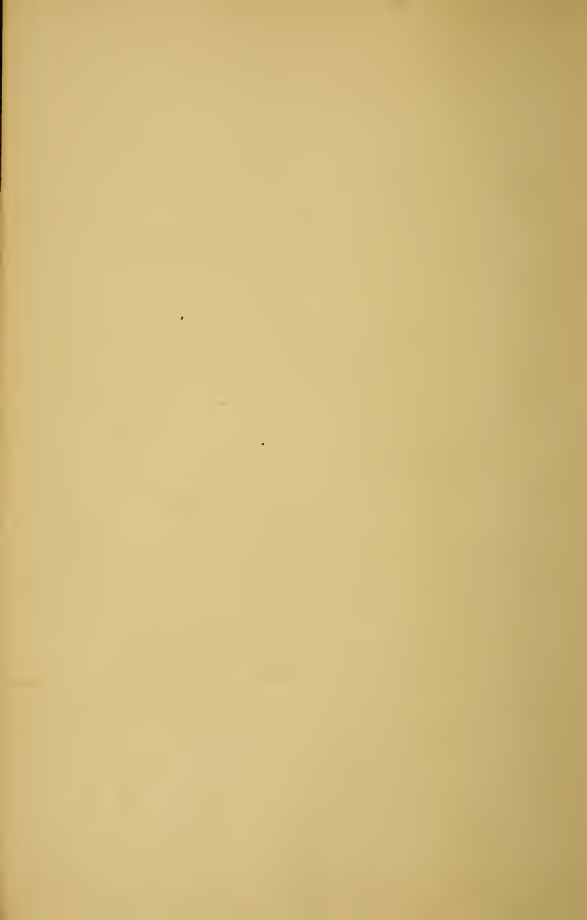
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PREFACE.



THIS little volume makes no pretensions to superior merit. It does not lay claim to any great literary excellence. Its chief value consists in the importance of the truths of which it treats.

It has been prepared at the earnest and frequent solicitation of many who listened to the discourses contained in it, as they were delivered from the pulpit. In treating the parable, it has been the writer's aim, in a familiar manner, to trace the analogy existing between the course of the prodigal and that of the sinner, from the moment of departure from God, till the penitential return.

No where are the richness and the fulness of Gospel grace so beautifully taught, as in this heavenly parable. The writer has endeavored to present these features as practically as possible. The design being to give them such a presentation that some might be benefited. In the preparation of this little volume, the Author has availed himself of the helps at hand.

J. C. D.

Bound Brook, N. J., January, 1870.





THE DEPARTURE.

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LUKE, 15 : 13.

“AND NOT MANY DAYS AFTER, THE YOUNGER SON GATHERED ALL TOGETHER, AND TOOK HIS JOURNEY INTO A FAR COUNTRY.”

BECAUSE the blessed Master kindly treated publicans and sinners, the Scribes and Pharisees were displeased. They would not associate with them ; it was a matter of surprise, therefore, that Jesus should “receive sinners and eat with them.” They forgot that the Saviour’s great errand on earth, was, not to “call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance :” that thus they might be fitted, hereafter, to sit down with Him in his

own beautiful home in glory. Christ would show these self-righteous hearers how delightful, how very delightful, was a sinner's conversion to God. The better to do this, He delivered this inimitable parable. And, in the whole Bible, there is not one in which the largeness, and the richness, of gospel grace, are set forth so beautifully, and so fully, as in this. Touching this parable it can truthfully be said, "what more could the Saviour do to encourage sinners to come to him?" Well has it been called "the Gospel within a Gospel." It tells the sinner everything that is needful to be known. It tells him how he may return to Jesus; and it assures him of a hearty welcome. How touchingly tender is the parable, in all its parts. How well calculated to cause to vibrate the finest chords in the human heart. By the employing of the figure of a father and child, and by the perfect representation of the father's solicitude, it must have brought conviction to even the hard hearts of Pharisees and Scribes.

With the elder son, or moral man, we have nothing to do. It is of the younger, or prodigal, that we desire to speak. It is this son that is designed to represent the character of the wandering sinner. It is our purpose to follow him, from the time of his leaving home till his penitential return, and his reception by his father, believing that his character represents, as nothing else can, the character of the sinner, from his departure until his return and reception by the Saviour. It marks out the path, in which every impenitent person must travel, if he comes to his Father and receives his forgiveness.

In this, our opening discourse, we shall pass over the younger son's previous life, and contemplate his departure from home. "And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together and took his journey into a far country."

We may remark:

First.—That he left his father's house *proudly*. This is implied in the words, "Father, give me the portion of goods that belongs to me." You see, that it is rather demanding that as a right, which his relation should have prompted him to ask as a favor. Doubtless the law of that country entitled him to it, when of age. Still, respect for the parent who had always treated him kindly, should have suggested a milder way of making his request known.

His bearing is conclusive proof that he possessed much pride. Roving in disposition, he was impatient of parental restraint. The home of his childhood had lost its attractiveness. Even his father's love had ceased to render him contented. And, with an assumed importance of manner, with a false confidence in his own ability, he said, "Give me my portion, and I will go. I will be my own master. I will trouble you no longer. I will leave the endearments of my early home. I will

go to be a wanderer in a far off country, and you shall hear of me no more." He was so proud that he was unkindly disrespectful to his father, and unjust to himself. No tear-stain was upon his cheek, and no feeling of sadness was in his heart. Pride, that enemy to contentment, to happiness, and to God, kept his false courage up, when the moment of his departure came. "Give me my portion, and let me go."

There surely was no credit in the younger son thus leaving the home of his childhood. Hereafter, should difficulties encompass his path, it would be a source of regret that he had thus left the father who had always been tender. Perhaps the prodigal knew it not; but in every respect he was leaving *home*. How suggestive, how thrillingly important, to the young man leaving his father's house, to battle with a world of which he knows but little!

As did the prodigal, so does the sinner depart

from God. No man ever yet cut himself loose from religious influences, who was not under the control of pride. Pride causes the sinner to wander, and pride keeps him from returning.

When speaking of the righteous, the Bible says, "God is a God that is near, and not afar off." But a sinning state is departing from God. It is a revolting from allegiance to Him; and the more sinful one becomes, the farther he goes. Sin places a barrier between the creature and the Creator. The more sin is committed, the larger this barrier becomes; and the greater *this* becomes, the farther does it remove from God. It is the teaching of the Bible that the wicked wander upon the dark mountains of sin. Isaiah told his erring countrymen, that their iniquities had separated between them and their God; and their sins had hid his face from them, that they could not hear. Sin, then, is a departure from God. And the sinner, in this departure, bears himself as proudly as did

the younger son. He does not say, "give me my portion," for he has none. He is poor. A beggar, without even a fig-leaf covering to hide his moral deformity! His very first step towards ruin, is marked with pride. "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?" "We desire not a knowledge of thy ways, thou King of Saints," is the language of his heart. Who has ever heard of one living in sin, when he might come to Jesus, who was not proud? Who has ever yet heard of one continuing to wander from God, in whom an unreasonable pride was not the motive power? It is pride that manufactures the glass of prejudice, through which he looks at everything good; and unless he repent, it is pride that will forge the chain that shall bind him in the prison-house of everlasting death.

The prodigal's first step, in the road to ruin, was taken when he so haughtily demanded his portion, and turned his back upon the home of his childhood, and the sinner's, when he refuses the

guardianship of Jesus, and wanders far away upon the dark mountains of sin.

We may remark :

Second.—That the prodigal left his father's house *voluntarily*. From no part of the narrative does there seem to have been any coercive measure used by the parent. There does not seem to have been any previous misunderstanding. There could not have been. Nothing but kindness and love was shown by the father. The first intimation he had of his son's purpose, was, when he came and so haughtily made his demand. Everything tended to show that the act was a perfectly voluntary one. Should his path be thorny, and difficulties hedge his way, after he had become a wanderer in a far off country, no one but himself would be responsible.

Had there been a single reason, the case would have been different. But there was none. Certainly not, as to accommodation, for these were

ample. They were more than enough for the father and the two sons ; for the men servants and the maid servants ; and for all who, at any time, might desire to partake of their hospitality.

Had there been a scarcity of provisions, it would have been different. But this was not the case. When the prodigal had wandered long, and had begun to feel the inconveniences and hardships of his voluntary exile, the first words that his impoverished state extorted from him, were, "How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare !"

Had his parent been unkind to him, it would have been different. But such was not the case. There was not one feeling in that parent's bosom, but regard and the tenderest love. He mourned his waywardness, and deeply did he feel the absence of his wandering son. And when, at length, a poor miserable beggar, he returned to crave the shelter of the roof from which, a season before,

he had so proudly departed, his father saw him a great way off, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. Everything tends to make it abundantly plain, that he left of his own accord; freely, voluntarily.

My friends, *so* is it with the sinner. He departs voluntarily from God. He goes, too, against the strongest solicitations of the strongest love. A heart as kind, as tender, and as loving as the Saviour's could not drive any away. Would the parent force his own child from home, to be a wanderer, upon the high-way of life? Sometimes this is the case. But it is never so with God. With deeper feeling than ever had a lodgement in human heart, Jesus would encircle the wanderer in his arms, and lay him upon his bosom, rather than drive him away. With double emphasis is it true, that, when the sinner departs from the Saviour, he goes voluntarily.

Take a man in his downward course ; view him, as step after step, he goes to fill an early and dishonored grave ; who will say, but that he acts voluntarily ? Perhaps not as much so when he gets to the bottom, as when he began to descend. Now his habit has obtained a wondrous power ; then it had not. But he took the first step with perfect freedom. Thus when the sinner departs from God, when evil befalls him, and he has had practical knowledge that the way of the transgressor is hard ; it will not be any alleviation of his misery to know that the act, on his part, was perfectly free ; that nothing but his sinful heart drew him from God.

Of what argument can the sinner make use to prove that Jesus forced him away ? Not one. There is no one who is so mindful of all his wants, or to whom he is under so many obligations. He cannot say that because of God's poverty, he is forced away. No one in the universe is so rich as

the Saviour. Every beast of the forest is His, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. The treasures which are hoarded in the teeming earth, and all the wealth of heaven, are also His. He has a sufficiency to give vast and enduring riches to all his creatures. The sinner cannot say that he is forced away because of God's accommodation. There is room in the banqueting chamber on earth, for every weary and heavy laden soul. In the house of many mansions, which Jesus went to prepare in glory, there are apartments for a thronging multitude. A great number have come out of tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb ; yet the fountain is still open, and its waters are ceaselessly flowing.

In truth, the sinner has no excuse for leaving, and going into a far country. In every respect his mouth must be stopped, and he be speechless. There is, with the Redeemer, unparalleled kind-

ness, boundless love, inconceivable wealth, and ample room. The sinner goes because he wishes to go. It is his own inclination that leads him to the course. Every person's departure from God is as certainly a free-will act, as was the prodigal son's, when he demanded his portion, departed from his father's door, and became a wanderer in a distant country.

We may remark :

Third.—That the prodigal left his home *against the wishes of his parent*. We are no where distinctly told this ; yet it is certainly to be inferred. It would seem to be in harmony with the natural promptings of the heart. Not only the ordinary, but the peculiar relation that parent and child sustained, the one to the other, would impel to such a belief. The father had only two sons—at once the objects of affection and the companions of his solitude. They lived in each other, and for each other. The sons' company would be doubly val-

ued, as the parent had begun to decline in years, and more than ever would he wish to retain them in his house, that they might cheer him in his loneliness, and help him to bear the burdens which age always brings. They would so smooth his pathway that his heart would be sunny. It must be, that the prodigal left home, on a journey so uncertain and eventful, against parental wishes.

By placing ourselves in the father's stead, we can readily imagine what his feelings must have been. Besides, where a stranger would not have seen danger, a tender parent would have seen much. In the same proportion to the danger, would be his anxiety that it should be avoided. We feel that it was one of the most gloomy hours of that parent's life, when the younger son left home for a far country. We feel that he took a portion of the happiness of that household with him. The tenor of the whole parable not only indicates this truth, but renders it perfectly appa-

rent. If, on his return,—after months of absence, a poor, tattered beggar, from his wearisome, painful wanderings,—his father saw him a great way off, and had compassion on him, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him, who can resist the conviction that a deep and changeless love filled that parent's heart toward his wayward and prodigal son? Who can doubt but that a tear stood in his eye, and sorrow filled his bosom, when that son departed to try his fortune in the world, and alone to buffet its stormy waves? Who can doubt that he went despite entreaties and prayers?

My friends, *so* it is with the sinner. There are none whom God will drive away. There are none whom He desires to go. There are none who have not a cordial and earnest welcome to stay. Of the millions who have wandered far away, there has not been one but that went against the wish of the Saviour. Jesus laid by His sceptre and His crown, and became incarnate to save such. “The

most tender expostulations of divine mercy, are uttered over the erring, and the sinning," and those far from God. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?" is His language to his wandering children. "I have no pleasure in the death of the sinner, but rather that he would turn unto me and live. Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die, O house of Israel."

We can imagine the strong yearnings of parental care, as shown in entreating the son to remain at home. As human nature would be operated upon, so human nature would show itself in the noblest character it ever assumes. But even imagination fails, when we would picture the unwillingness of the Saviour, to let the sinner wander upon the mountains of iniquity;—as His care is so higher, deeper, broader, and stronger, than anything of which earth has knowledge. He, whose life was one continuous act of kindness and of love, when He dwelt among men; He, who now

stands at the door of the sinner's heart, and knocks for admittance, till the dew-drops hang from his locks, is distressed, when any of His creatures are desirous of wandering from His presence. He would have all to stay, and partake of His kindness and His care forever.

Impenitent friends, you have wandered—wandered far from God. You have departed, not only voluntarily, but against the wishes of the best and truest Friend that you can ever have. Did the father think, with grief, of his wandering son, when his home was with strangers, and his condition that of the most degraded menial. So Jesus looks down, from his beautiful home, upon you; and feels that He cannot give you up. When the sinner goes away from the Saviour, he goes from home. He leaves the house, where the lowest servant has enough and to spare, for a pittance; and that for a few years at most. Would that we could tell you how much you lose, when

you go away from the Redeemer. You exchange happiness for misery—joy for sorrow—the companionship of Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and the general assembly and church of the first-born, for that of Satan and the fallen angels.

Think of the kindness He has done you. Think of the blessings with which He has crowned your way. Think of the invitations, which He has extended to you, of adoption into His family. Think that, not a day, or an hour of the day, His eye has not watched over you; and His hand has not led you gently along. And can you have the least doubt, that your departure greatly grieves Him?

Besides, none ever leave the Saviour, who do not themselves bitterly regret it. When sickness comes, or death stands knocking for admittance at their hearts, they would give untold wealth for

the companionship and love of Jesus. Why will you depart into a far country? Why will you place a barrier between you and your God?

As we told you in the beginning, sin is this barrier; the more and the greater the sin committed, the larger does *it* become; and the further does it remove one from his heavenly Father. And the experience of the world has proved it to be true, that the longer one stays away from God, the greater the uncertainty that he will ever return.

My friends, I would not go away from plenty—from happiness—and from love. I would not leave the place around which, hereafter, memory will linger; nor the person, touching whom will be the most bitter regrets of the dying hour. Oh no! I would not leave my Father's bosom for any spot in this cold world of sin. I would not be a wanderer, in a far off country, when I could re-

main at home. I would not spend my days among strangers and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, when I might pass them in quietude among the members of the household of faith. I would not have God as my enemy, when He so much desires to be my friend. Then be instructed by the prodigal, and learn a life-long lesson from his sad experience and from his hard lot. Renounce your sins, and remain at home with Jesus.



THE CONDITION.

LUKE, 15 : 14, 15, 16.

“AND WHEN HE HAD SPENT ALL, THERE AROSE A MIGHTY FAMINE IN THAT LAND ; AND HE BEGAN TO BE IN WANT.

“AND HE WENT AND JOINED HIMSELF TO A CITIZEN OF THAT COUNTRY ; AND HE SENT HIM INTO HIS FIELDS TO FEED SWINE.

“AND HE WOULD FAIN HAVE FILLED HIS BELLY WITH THE HUSKS THAT THE SWINE DID EAT.”

THAT sin, as well as drowsiness, will clothe a man with rags, is a truth that none can question. That sin will not only lead to poverty, but to the lowest conceivable degradation, is equally true ; and that, while it makes poor and degrades, it renders unhappy and miserable, is as certainly the case. Aside from our own observation, this is abundantly proved by the history of the world, and by the word of God. You can mark the

course of sin, by the countless evils that follow in its train. It is, confessedly, the greatest enemy to man; and the most fatal to his present and everlasting happiness. It robs him of the honors of his pristine state, and leads him by a path that ever inclines downward.

In this discourse, the second upon this interesting parable, we are led to view the misery into which sin plunges its subject, and some of the dreadful straits into which it leads him. As we remarked, a moment since, sin robs man of everything that is noble, and places him, in the scale of being, by the side of the beasts that perish. It blunts the finer feelings of his nature, and makes him anything but what he was when he came from the hands of his Maker.

We ask your attention, while we dwell upon the prodigal's *condition* when in a far country.

We remark :

First.—That he was in an *impoverished* condition. This truth is clearly taught in the words, “And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in the land, and he began to be in want.” Then poverty was not merely seen at a distance, but she really encircled him in her haggard arms. How pointedly, yet how modestly, it describes deep indigence. He began to be in want—not of the luxuries, nor of the comforts, but of the necessities, of life. “What shall I eat, what shall I drink, and wherewithal shall I be clothed?” were enquiries in which he had a mournfully deep interest.

The remaining verses of the text show conclusively that his poverty must have been extreme. Nothing but dire necessity would have constrained him to resort to the means that he did, to procure a scanty livelihood. “And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into the fields to feed swine. And he

would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him."

Now place these two pictures together. The young man, at his father's, with every comfort and luxury. The young man, in a far off country, in so starving a condition that he was obliged to rob the swine of part of their food. We cannot think of anything that tells of poverty so deep and so pinching, or of wretchedness that has more of misery in it. At his father's, he said to one "Go;" and he went. To another "Come;" and he came. In a far off country, he was the very lowest of servants, engaged in the very lowest of occupations. At his father's he had the best of homes; the kindest of parents; true friends; and sympathizing kinsmen. In a far off country, he had no home; no father; no friends; no kinsmen. There were none that loved him; none that cared for him; and none that felt an interest in his welfare. At his father's he had more than enough

to eat, and to drink, and to be clothed. In a far off country, he was a poor, tattered beggar, with scarcely enough to sustain life.

Is it, can it, be he, who so proudly demanded his portion that he might go? Can it be he who voluntarily left the home of his childhood? It is the same. But how changed! We can scarcely recognize, in the haggard, ragged, and half-starved swine-feeder, the younger son, who, at home, had every luxury that wealth could procure. Could we but draw these two pictures truthfully before you, the conviction could not be resisted, that the prodigal's condition was an impoverished one.

So is it with the sinner. You require not to be told that this part of the parable is replete with instruction. It is a truth, abundantly confirmed, that sin will bring a man into straits; and that, equally with drowsiness, it will clothe him with rags. When one departs from God, he leaves

comfort, and plenty, and wealth. And he says to poverty "thou art my father;" and to misery, "thou art my mother and my sister."

Point us to the man who has wandered far away upon the dark mountains of sin, and we will show you one who is poor. No matter if attired in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day. Lazarus, the beggar,—whose clothing was tattered; whose body was covered with loathsome sores; whose only friends were the dogs that licked them; who vainly begged for the crumbs that fell from Dives' table; whose bed was the ground; whose pillow was a stone; who, in this humble manner, died alone, unpitied and unwept; who was carried out by strangers and buried in an unknown grave, with no stone to mark his last resting-place,—was infinitely more wealthy than the rich man, at whose gate he lay.

The poor, slighted and despised beggar had a

band of angels to hover around his humble death-place; to bear his freed and raptured soul to the ante-chamber of the great King. The rich man, though surrounded with every luxury, and with hosts of friends, died alone. There was not a single visitant from a happier sphere to hover around his gorgeous death-bed; to bear his departing spirit tenderly up to that fair land where the angels live. The one was rich in the wealth that waxeth not old; while he, to whose earthly possessions there was hardly a limit, was poor.

However paradoxical it may seem to the world, is nevertheless true, that he who has departed from God is poor. As much so as was the prodigal, when tending his master's swine in a far country. There is as great a contrast, between such an one's condition then, and what it would have been had he not departed from God, as there was between the prodigal's, at his father's house, and the prodigal's in a far country. What is the

wealth of earth worth, when its possessor has thrown away His mercies; “the favor of God; the strivings of the Spirit; and the admonitions of conscience?” Is not the sinner poor? Does he not suffer the most pinching poverty, if in want of necessities for the soul?

A departure from God,—a sinful state,—“is like the land where famine always reigns.” The worst poverty, ever seen or felt on earth, is spiritual poverty. We can imagine a condition that is perfectly miserable. Where one is penniless, friendless, homeless; and with barely enough to sustain a nature half famished by abstinence; yet we can tell you of a lot harder to be borne; of a condition that is infinitely more miserable. Where one is living away from God, with no treasure laid up “where moth does not corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal.” You cannot think of a state so utterly destitute of everything that is desirable; as having no hope

in the world, and marching down to everlasting death.

We remark:

Second.—That the prodigal's condition was *degraded*. He moved in a rank, so far below the one to which he had previously belonged, that scarcely would you know him to be the same person. He was so debased that all sense of honor had departed. This is plainly inferable from the words, "and he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into the fields to feed swine." He was willing to engage in any occupation, and to perform any duty, regardless of character.

To see the force of these words, and to have a just conception of his degradation, it must be remembered that the young man was a Jew. While, therefore, the employment of feeding swine, was an occupation in which none but the lowest class

engaged, to a Jew it was particularly mean. It was forbidden to them to eat swine's flesh ; it was even unlawful for them to keep it. For the poorest of them to be thus occupied was looked upon as a degradation ; but for one who had previously moved in the higher walks of life, it was inconceivably low. How great the change must have been to him, from former competence to present want ! To what a pitiable depth he must have sunk, that he would hire himself for such employment, even to preserve his life !

We are tempted to enquire, whether it *can* be the same person who was so comfortable and happy ; a loved inmate of his father's house. It was the same. But what a change ! What a commentary on those words of the Bible, "The way of the transgressor is hard." Unless his moral sense was perfectly deadened, he must have felt that his own hand had prepared wormwood and gall to drink.

So is it with the sinner. You require not to be told that this part of the prodigal's history describes, with singular accuracy, a part of the history of every sinner. Who does not know that sin debases him who commits it? The design of this figure is to show the degradation of transgression; and, surely, nothing could more vividly do it.

What in the world is meaner than sin? What will more quickly and certainly, degrade one in the estimation of the wise and good? What sooner than it, will make one an exile from his heavenly Father, and a lone wanderer in this far off wilderness? Sin strips man of honor. It robs him of dignity. It takes from him all claim to respect. It deadens his perceptions to right and to wrong. It makes him forgetful of every moral obligation. It renders God an enemy; and it lowers him, in the scale of being, to an equality with the beasts that perish. Sin makes the

man who commits it, as disreputable, in the view of good men, as was the prodigal, in the estimation of his countrymen, when he was a swine-feeder in a distant land. There is nothing that, so effectually as sin, roots out everything in the soul that is virtuous; and renders it a perfect blank to heavenly aspirations.

Think of the long catalogue of crimes that it heads, and of the numberless victims whom it sends to early and dishonored graves. Would you see loathsome debasement? You will find it in him who is the willing child of vice! Would you see it in its most disgusting forms? Go to him who has cut himself loose from all moral restraints! and you will see it till the heart grows sick—you will see a debasement that is as low as the brutes—a degradation that is a disgrace to humanity.

Degradation and sin are synonymous; where

one is you will always find the other. In the wide world you cannot find a man, who has departed from God by reason of sin, who is not wonderfully, painfully sunken.

On the other hand, you cannot find one, who has walked in the Saviour's precepts, and obeyed His commandments, who has not dignity as a crown of glory upon his head.

You must allow us to repeat a thought, of which we have made use. Sin will bring a man into the committal of deeds, so mean and so base, that respectability will turn from him with horror, and virtue will weep when looking upon a scene so mournful. Sin, in its results to us, is what the feeding of swine was to the prodigal. Its course is downward. Its fruit is bitterness, debasement and death. Like the oriental serpent, sin always covers its victim with its nauseous slime; thus making it as but the personification of itself.

Happy, thrice happy, is he, who is free from its tyrannical chains, and over whom it does not exert an influence. Must not sin be degrading in its nature? Must it not be that abominable thing that God hateth?

We remark:

Third.—The prodigal was *unhappy*. This is not distinctly told us. It is, however, a natural inference from the words of the text, “And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine, and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into the fields to feed swine.” To us it seems, that he could not have been other than perfectly miserable with such surroundings.

Busy, mournful memory, must have revived the scenes of other days. Could he be otherwise, when in his loneliness, and poverty, and debasement, he thought of the father he had grieved;

of the home he had left ; and of the abundance he had foolishly and inexcusably squandered ? Could he be otherwise, when he thought of what might have been his condition, and what it was ?

Let the feelings which that comparison was likely to produce, have a lodgement in your heart ; and you cannot but see, that his must have been saddened by a thousand harassing emotions. His exile must have been a hard one, enlivened by not the smallest joy. His own thoughts must have been tormentors ; and his torturing misery the scorpion that was always stinging. Were we asked to picture a condition, that would give the most perfect idea of unhappiness, we should refer you to that half-starved, half-clothed swine-feeder, in a far country ; and, as we asked you to look upon him, with hollow cheek, with sunken eye, with despairing countenance, with filthy, tattered rags, that scarce covered his nakedness, and with almost a maniac look, we should feel that you

had before you living unhappiness, and absolute misery.

Tell us not that wretchedness has her dwelling-place anywhere in this dark world of sin, if she had not a lodgement in the heart of that poor, lone wanderer from his father's door. He was unhappy. The memories of the past ; the extremities of the present ; and the uncertainties of the future, were all calculated to make him so.

So is it with the sinner. Need we tell you, that this part of the prodigal's history, is filled with most valuable instruction? It is no strange doctrine to communicate, that the sinner is unhappy. Yea, that at times he is very miserable. In whose bosom should painful apprehensions reign supreme, if not in his who has wandered far from God, and from all the pleasure which intercourse with Him produces? Whose bosom should be filled with the keenest anguish, if not his, of whom the Bible

declares, that he is like the ever-moving, restless sea? Who should so painfully know the depth of sorrow, as he who is living without God, and without hope in the world? Who should feel the gloom of coming ill so painfully as he with whom God is angry every day; and who has no prospect of an inheritance beyond the grave? With no hope, either for this life or for that which is to come; with nothing from which to draw consolation, to sustain in sickness, or to buoy above the terrors of the dying hour, the sinner must be unhappy. "Who has misery—who has woe—who has anguish," like the godless man? Is it not true that these words of the Bible, "the heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger does not intermeddle with its grief," have their fullest confirmation in the experience of the impenitent?

My friends, dismiss other thoughts, and tell us; yea, rather answer to conscience and to God: Is this not true? Compare your feelings of every-

day ; your hours of trouble ; your days of sickness ; and the sad seasons when you are obliged to think upon death. Do you feel a calmness of which dying cannot rob you ? When you think of the house in which there is enough and to spare—when you think of the Father whose kindness is unparalleled—when you think of the peace that none can feel, save those whom Jesus has pardoned—when you think of privileges misimproved, and of mercies slighted—when you think of the judgment-seat, where you must stand alone ; and of the severe trial, from which there is no appeal—when you think of an eternity, spent away from God, in a world of torment—tell me, are you happy ?

'Tis but the mockery of your grief, to call it by that sacred name. Happy, and a wanderer from God ! Happy, with sin filling your hearts ! Happy, and an alien from the commonwealth of Israel ! Happy, going down to death with no

preparation to meet it! Happy, going up to the tribunal of the Judge without a friend! It is a delusion. A sad and fatal error.

But we will tell you when you *can* be happy. When you return with penitence to the Saviour, from whom you have departed. When you sit at His feet, clothed and in your right minds. When you are humble learners of Him, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light.



THE RESOLUTION.

LUKE, 15 : 17, 18, 19.

“AND WHEN HE CAME TO HIMSELF, HE SAID, HOW MANY HIRED SERVANTS OF MY FATHER’S HAVE BREAD ENOUGH AND TO SPARE, AND I PERISH WITH HUNGER. I WILL ARISE AND GO TO MY FATHER, AND WILL SAY UNTO HIM, FATHER, I HAVE SINNED AGAINST HEAVEN AND BEFORE THEE, AND AM NO MORE WORTHY TO BE CALLED THY SON ; MAKE ME AS ONE OF THY HIRED SERVANTS.”

AS the precious ore lies embedded in the bowels of the earth, so the real beauty of the Bible lies beneath the surface. As, in the one case, to obtain, we must dig ; so, in the other, to discover, we must study. If, when we opened the Bible to read, we would observe this rule, we should be surprised at the amount of beauty, and the wondrous force contained, in almost every

part. It is a lamentable fact, that the Bible is often an unmeaning book ; because it is glanced over—without proper attention and study.

This beautiful parable is a case in point. If we open the Scriptures, at this place, and read the narrative of the prodigal son carelessly, without thinking of its design, or that which it is calculated to teach, we shall not find very much to attract our attention. We shall see but few of its excellencies. Simply, a young man, tired of the restraints of home, and wishing to travel, demands of his father his portion, that he may gratify his inclination. Not having the advantage of experience, and being viciously disposed, he falls into the company of those more wily than himself ; loses his property and his character, and is obliged to return home and live upon his parent. You all know that there are many such instances in our day. Let us, however, read this parable with fixed and prayerful attention ; with deep and

unvarying care; and we shall dig out a meaning that is unparalleled for beauty, for interest, and for importance. We shall find in it, feelings and operations that describe, with singular accuracy, the emotions of our hearts, if ever we become members of the household of faith.

We ask your serious attention, for the subject is worthy it, as for a season we dwell upon the prodigal's *resolution*. And we beg you to remember, that, while we are endeavoring to analyze the feelings that prompted him, in coming to his determination, we shall also be bringing before you the exercises of every convicted person.

We remark:

First.—That *consideration* was contained in this resolution.

This is evident from the words, “And when he came to himself, he said: How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to

spare, and I perish with hunger." Previously he seems not to have given to his condition the least thought ; but to "have been as one deranged." And it was only when he came into such a pitiable state—when his necessities were so great as to be without apparel—without food—without health—without home—and without friends—that he came to himself, and his madness left him. He thought upon his way. He had time for reflection. Faithfully did he ponder the past, the present, and the future. He compared the one with the other, and the result of that comparison was very unsatisfactory.

In imagination, my friends, let us go nearer and look upon him, as his moral insanity is about departing, and he is coming to himself. You see him, as, many miles distant from the paternal roof, in his master's field, he stands alone by his swine. As he feels the gnawing of an unsatisfied hunger, and the burning of a feverish thirst ; as his eye

wanders over his ragged apparel and his emaciated person, he begins to consider ; he comes to himself. The moment he does it his thoughts are keenly alive, and they fly backward to better days, and to happier hours ; and he *thinks* what he might have been, and what he is.

Something after this manner he soliloquizes :
“ In my father’s house there are many servants ; but all, even to the lowest, have bread enough and to spare. All are comfortably clothed, with ample accommodation, and without the necessity of apprehension for the future. But how different is it with me. Without friends ; without clothing ; without home, and without food. For I perish with hunger. Affairs have come to a mournful crisis. There is no way of bettering my condition, or of obtaining the means of relief. I know not to whom I can go, or who will give me assistance. I am on the lowest round of the ladder, at the very bottom of the hill. An exile from my father’s

family, and a lone man in this far off wilderness. At the farthest, but a little season longer can I follow this degraded employment. Daily do I become weaker. Darker become my prospects. What shall I do?

“There is no alternative—I must perish. When, from exhaustion, I am unable to perform this mean work, none will look kindly upon me—none will give me a pillow for my weary head—none will give me a shelter from the driving storm, and none will watch by my couch of pain. My master, when I can serve him no longer, will turn me away. Then every resource will have failed me, and in a far country and among strangers, I must die. Death, in the most melancholy circumstances, is the only thing before me. What *can* I do? How is it possible that I could so long remain blind to my condition? How could I so long sport upon the verge of ruin, and thought myself safe? Whither shall I go? There is no place on

earth to which I can go, save one; and that is to the home of my childhood.

“But will my father, whom I have so much grieved, pardon me? I know not. I have wilfully disappointed his expectations, and opposed his most cherished wishes. Every resource fails me. Every hope leaves me. I feel almost ready to give up to despair. Yet, reduced to the lowest depths of indigence, and with darkness all around me, I am almost determined to return—for dreamy memories of happier hours come as a balm to my wounded soul. One thing is certain. My condition cannot possibly be worse than it is. If I stay where I am, a sad and bitter death must be my doom. And I cannot more than die, if I return and my efforts at reconciliation with my parent are unsuccessful. Besides, I would sooner die, with my eyes resting upon the abode of my childhood—with my father’s name faltering upon my tongue—and with my father’s hand clasped in

mine, than die alone, unpitied and unwept, anywhere else in this cold world.

“Though fallen, and only the wreck of what I was; though without the least claim upon my parent’s love; whatever the result may be; whether I meet with affection or hatred, I am resolved:—*I will go.*”

When he began thus to consider, how soon his resolution was formed. In what different light this determination caused him to see things. When he began to reflect, he began to be alarmed. The longer he thought, the greater his alarm became. Truly, if he had never thought—never reflected—never considered—he had never come to the resolution he did. It was sober, serious thought, that made the prodigal’s exile irksome, and that begat the resolution to arise and go to his father.

My friends, we cannot tell you all the wondrous beauty; the depth of meaning; and the

great importance, which this part of the subject presents to us. The prodigal, in this part of his career, is a life-like picture of the heavy-laden soul, when the arrow of conviction is beginning to wound. The thoughts, and feelings, and agonies, of the anxious heart, are here described with singular accuracy. No one ever passes from death unto life who does not see his danger. Nor does any one ever become alarmed for his state unless he reflect. Consideration, therefore, is the first step "toward conversion."

No one ever became a new creature in Jesus, who did not first reflect. Every sinner, like the prodigal, must first needs come to himself; as every sinner, like the prodigal, is laboring under a species of derangement on the subject of personal religion. And, though he may previously have thought himself rich, and increased in goods, and having need of nothing; when he begins to *consider*, he finds that he is poor, and miserable,

and blind, and naked, and having need of everything. Like the prodigal, he makes the discovery that his condition is alarmingly dangerous. He trembles to find not a single resource, where, before, he supposed there were many. Every comfort in which he hoped is gone. Every staff upon which he depended is broken.

He considers the law; but the law condemns him. He cannot fulfil one of its numberless requirements; and justice frowns upon him, let him look to what part of the decalogue he may. He considers the character of his master; and, like the younger son of the parable, he feels that no reliance can be placed upon him; that amid his sorrows he will not give him relief; and that, in the hour of his extremity he will turn him away. He considers the character of his life, and he finds nothing to approve, but everything to condemn. He considers the character of the God from whom he has departed, and because of his sinfulness, he

sees not a ray of hope, as uncompromising justice is enthroned upon the brow of the great Law-giver. He feels that in his Father's house there is plenty, and perpetual happiness; but that he has forfeited all claim upon the one, or right to the other. He looks without; and on every side there is darkness and despair. He looks within, and there is no calmness, nor peace, nor happiness. Law and conscience, life and God, all condemn him.

Thus *considering*, he feels that something must be done right speedily. That every moment's delay but ten-fold increases the danger. That but a little season more, and he shall be beyond hope. As he thinks and meditates, everything is dark and alarming. "What shall I do to be saved?" is the bitter cry that breaks from his tortured bosom. He feels that should he remain where he is, he must be lost. And he knows, as well, that no one can give him assistance.

Yes, there is *One* who can take the burden from his shoulders, and the grief from his heart. There is *One* who can do all for him that his circumstances require; and who can direct him in the road to heaven. “But will He receive me? I have grieved Him so much, and sinned against Him so long. I fear that He will not, cannot pardon me.” He considers farther: “There is no one save He that will love me. There is no arm, save His, that can sustain me. If I remain in my present state I must perish. And I can no more than perish if I go. Besides, if I must die, I would sooner do it, with my eyes resting upon Calvary, that dear, hallowed spot—that deathless pledge of the world’s redemption from everlasting woe, as their last object; praying and begging for pardon; than expire far from Calvary, with no prayer upon my tongue. Whatever the result may be, as I have nothing to lose, but everything to gain, I will go.”

You see how much *consideration* has to do with the resolution. No man ever *really* made it, who did not first think. And when once well considered, he formed the resolution. These feelings have a lodgement in the sinner's heart, when conviction begins. This resolution, therefore, is the important, the almost turning point, toward a change of heart. It is the first step toward the narrow way, that begins in the city of destruction, and that ends in the Jerusalem above.

We remark :

Second.—That a *fixed determination*, entered into this resolution.

This is evident from the words, “I *will* arise and go to my father.” This mode of expression is common among men. In the prodigal's case, it “denoted entering on a piece of business.” It means “that he had firmly resolved to return immediately.” He had considered well his condi-

tion. He had looked upon it in every light. He had weighed every plan. He had clung to every hope; until it were madness to do it longer. A false and dangerous pride had prompted him to contrive every way to remain. He resolved that he would do anything, rather than return to his parent, and crave the shelter of his roof. When, however, he had thought of every method, and all seemed equally useless; stern and imperious necessity impelled him to act as he did.

But when once his resolution was taken, his mind was determinately fixed, nothing could change it. Nothing could even cause it to waver. He thought not, and cared not, what others might think, or say, or do. How his departure might affect his master, does not seem to have troubled him at all. It is true, when he thought of the difficulties of the way; when he looked upon his altered appearance, and upon his dirty and ragged apparel, he doubted and feared. These doubts

and fears troubled and perplexed him, from the moment he set out on his journey, till his parent held him in his arms, and whispered forgiveness to his troubled soul. But his misgivings did not cause his purpose to waver. Go he would, though his suit should be denied, and he should be turned from his father's door to die.

From the moment his resolution was taken, his father, his father's house, and the reception with which he would be likely to meet, were the thoughts that most engrossed his attention. As he laid him down upon his comfortless bed, it was the last subject upon which he thought. When he opened his eyes upon the morrow it was the first thing in his mind. If, at any time, his ears were assailed by those who wished to discourage, he stopped them that he might not hear. Neither temptation, nor ridicule, nor discouragement, could make a lasting impression upon that iron will. His heart, his desire, and his gaze were

homeward, "Thither will I go," was the language of his heart.

Look upon the prodigal as he stands in his master's field—think of his past and his present—narrowly scan his anxious, troubled countenance, and you must feel that his purpose was fixed; as all his hopes of happiness centred upon its execution.

How strictly correct is all this, touching the convicted sinner. The same fixedness of purpose is possessed by every one who reaches heaven, and sits down within the limits of the glorious inheritance. Every convicted sinner, before he forms this resolution, considers long and deeply his condition. He tries every means and clings to every hope. When, therefore, it is taken, relying upon the Spirit for strength, it is adhered to with the most rigid tenacity.

Associates may ridicule, and friends may say this thing or that, yet his only answer is, "*I will*

go." If they strive to shame him out of his resolution, yet is he the more determined to persevere. If they bring up the difficulties with which he must contend, and the probability that, after all, his suit will not be successful, yet does he not despair. He may be discouraged, but not entirely cast down. He knows that he is an alien from God; and his doubts of final acceptance at times make him dispirited. Yet does he tell of the crown with which he hopes to be crowned; and of the spotless robe with which he hopes to be attired. It is manifestly true, that where God has begun a good work, He will carry it on till the day of Jesus Christ. It is as certainly the case, then, that where the arrow has been driven by the Master, there will be fixedness of purpose.

We remark :

Third.—That *humility* entered into this resolution.

This is distinctly shown in the words, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants." What deep humility! How different the spirit of the prodigal departing, and the spirit of the prodigal returning. In the one case, there was a haughty demand for his portion. In the other, a humble craving for the humblest place in his father's household. "I am not worthy to be called thy son. I am not worthy to be taken to thy bosom. Make me as one of thy hired servants; and because it will be so much better than I deserve, I will be content. I come to you as the last resource, and if I fail, my misery will be greater than I can bear." Though haggard and with ragged apparel—a wandering mendicant, yet the spirit of the prodigal, returning, was heavenly, compared with the spirit of the prodigal departing.

Thus, there is no sinner who comes to his Father,

who does not have the same feelings of humility. Every one who comes rightfully, feels thus unworthy; feels the same willingness to be treated as the lowest in Christ's household. There is no place for pride in the bosom of him who is really penitent. The principle that is so obnoxious to God, can flourish anywhere else better than near the valley of contrition. Humility—a deep self-abasement—is the most prominent feeling of the weary and heavy-laden soul. “Only let me become a member of your household, and an heir of glory; and the terms you may dictate. Let me be the lowest of all who shall hereafter stand upon the heavenly Mount Zion; only do not turn me away, and I am content.” On this point, all anxious souls agree. When one resolves to be a Christian, he does it with humility, but with a firm purpose, relying entirely upon the Saviour.

We said that the subject is interesting, and so indeed it is; as it has brought us to a considera-

tion of the feelings and exercises of the sinner when he comes to himself. Are we travelling this road? If we are not, let us hasten to enter it. It will lead us to happiness, to glory, and to God. It will place us among the number of those who weep now, that hereafter we may be glad and rejoice. It will give us a membership in our Father's household, and a place in our Father's bosom.



THE RETURN.

LUKE, 15 : 20.

“AND HE AROSE, AND CAME TO HIS FATHER.”

DOUBTLESS, the most of us, at some time or another during life, have looked upon a landscape which at first seemed almost entirely destitute of either interest or beauty. But, as we advanced toward it, and studied it more attentively, from seeming ordinary, it has become beautiful, and our interest in it has become absorbing. My friends, we have thought that to something like this landscape, we could liken this parable. That which to some, in the beginning, might seem uninteresting, as we advance, step by step, and meditate more deeply upon its great truths, is found to be possessed not only of interest, but of real

worth. In truth, we cannot imagine how it could well be otherwise.

The prodigal is presented to us in so many aspects, and they are all so applicable, that almost, unconsciously, but quite naturally, they awaken a lively interest. Spiritually, there is no respect in which this parable is not worthy to be deeply and prayerfully studied by every class. By him, who is yet in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity, that he may see the way over which he must travel, if ever he return to his Father's house a penitent, and experience his Father's everlasting kindness. By him who has fled to Jesus, as the only refuge from the wrath to come, that he may again think upon the way along which he traveled, when he started on his pilgrimage to the celestial city.

We last considered the prodigal's resolution to arise and go to his father. We come, to-night,

to dwell upon the practical part of that resolution—its execution. You will carefully remark, that had he not formed the resolution, he would never have returned. Notwithstanding, the resolution would have been of no avail, unless put into practical operation, he might have resolved, and resolved, and had he been content with this, he would have died of starvation, as a poor swine-feeder in his master's field. The simple resolution to go, and not putting it in practice, would be the same as saying to our famished and half-clothed neighbor, "be ye clothed, or fed," without making the least effort to do either the one or the other.

There must be action. There must be a carrying into effect that which we have resolved to perform. We take it, that the prodigal's returning to his father's house, was the practical operation of the resolution to which he had come.

At this particular point, there is a most impor-

tant thought, to which, in passing, we would briefly refer. A person may resolve that he will forsake some injurious habit; or become a better man; or not grieve the Spirit. If, however, he stops here, it will not benefit him.

We do not doubt that there are many souls in perdition, who went thither with scores of resolutions unperformed. And we believe that there is not a single impenitent person, here, who has not often promised himself, yea, most solemnly resolved, that he would be a Christian; but not putting the resolution into practice, is as far from God to-day, as he was months since.

There is nothing more important than this. It is indispensable; and the hinge to which is attached the eternal happiness or misery of hundreds and of thousands. Oh, then, remember that mere resolving will never save one. There must be something more than this. There must be doing

as well as thinking. It was that, as well as this, that brought the prodigal a humble penitent to his father's door. It is this, which shall at last open the gates of heaven to the returning sinner, and give him a seat among the sanctified.

In the discussion of the subject farther, we remark:

First.—That in returning, the prodigal acted *voluntarily*. This is evident from the words, “and he arose and came to his father,” distinctly implying, that he was not influenced by foreign interference. He had thought well and deeply upon the matter, and he had deliberately concluded that such a course would be best. This was, however, after he was most painfully convinced that every other means would not give him the slightest relief. The very first step in his homeward journey was unrestrained, so far as the freedom of his will was concerned. His actions were as free as are the footsteps of the wild deer in his native

forest, or the soarings of the eagle in his upward flight.

This is rendered doubly manifest from the fact that the prodigal's condition was, to a degree, an isolated one. He scarcely had one with whom to communicate ; much less one by whom to be influenced. As alone he experienced his misery—so alone he resolved to free himself from it.

My friends, we conceive this thought to be one of immense importance. Repentance,—the returning of the sinner to God,—is a perfectly voluntary act. It is true, that no man can come unto the Saviour, except the Father draw him. It is true, Oh, how true ! that, in the matter of salvation, without Jesus we can do nothing, Yet is it the case, that it is our duty to strive, just as much as if the gaining a seat in heaven depended on our own exertion.

On this point we desire to bring before you an

illustration, in which we shall, in part, avail ourselves of the thoughts of another. A man, for instance, chooses what appears to him to be best. In one sense, "you may call it a necessary choice. On the principle that his great object is to please himself. And to suppose that he would have any other object than pleasing himself, is absurd." It is, moreover, an absolute impossibility; as it would be supposing him "to will and not to will, at the same time." His volition is perfectly free, as in doing what he does, he deliberates and chooses, without recognizing the interference of any foreign cause. But "this willingness is the *consequence* of the view which his mind takes of the object before him." Now apply this to the subject before us.

When a man returns to God, he follows the inclination of his own will, as certainly and as entirely as at any other time. Previously to this, he followed the inclination which led him to do

wrong. Subsequently to this, he followed the inclination which led him to do right. And could you say there was less of freedom, or choice, in the one case than in the other? Surely not.

You will remark, however, that, in the one case as well as in the other, "it is the view which his mind takes of the object," that leads him to the choice. Now, it is God who, in a way mysterious to us, so operates upon the man's mind that he takes such a view of the object. Yet, "when he does it, the man does not feel that he is in the least restrained, or that he is acting under volitions produced by foreign causes," any more than when he wills to leave his house, or sits down at his table. He acts so naturally and so freely, that when his mind takes this impression, he has no desire to inquire into the source from which it comes.

God implants in the heart of the sinner the disposition to return to Him; but the way is so hid-

den and mysterious, that the sinner voluntarily follows the inclination which this implantation produces. This is what we mean by free moral agency. This is what we mean by a man's acting voluntarily.

We say, then, that true repentance,—the returning of the sinner to God,—is a perfectly voluntary act. That the sinner, in doing it, follows the inclination of his own will, as much as the prodigal when he returned, a penitent wanderer, to his father's door. Repentance is the practical operation of the purpose of the sinner to go; “and he cheerfully and cordially arises and goes.” “Choose ye this day, whom ye will serve.” Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his own good pleasure.” The gates of the celestial city stand open, night and day, to every humble and sincere inquirer. But none enter them against their will. The Saviour is ever

ready to receive the returning prodigal ; but He will not compel any to come against their inclination.

It is a truth, however, for which we are thankful, that God's people are "*willing* in the day of his power." That when they have wandered long upon the mountains of sin ; when they have felt the inability of the world to confer enjoyment ; when they see their danger, and know that only Jesus can save them ; then, as the prodigal, they arise and go to their Father.

We remark :

Second.—That in returning, the prodigal began his journey *immediately*. We are nowhere distinctly told that this is the case, yet we feel warranted in drawing the inference from the entire narrative. "And when he came to himself, he said, how many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with

hunger. I will arise and go to my father. And he arose and came to his father." It is evident, that, immediately after he formed the resolution, he proceeded to carry it into effect. Taking into account the loneliness of his situation, and the extremity of his poverty, we can imagine that many considerations operated upon his mind, in coming to the determination he did, and in causing him to put it in force forthwith. He weighed the matter well. He counted the cost. He thought of the whole thing, in its length, and breadth, and height, and depth.

He viewed the subject in every light of which it was capable. And having determined that this was the proper course, without waiting for counter influences to produce a reaction—or his ardor to cool, or his noble resolve to weaken, he began his homeward journey. He closed with his conviction and improved it. He gave no opportunity for a change of purpose. While his thoughts were

around the home of his childhood, he was making the preparation to go.

My friends, this putting his resolution into immediate effect, under God, was the only thing that saved him. This was the important step, connected with which were long years of happiness to the prodigal. Who can tell of the consequences had he not thus acted? Who can tell how early his earthly sun would have set, and in what dark clouds? Had he not started then, doubtless he would never have seen his father's door; but his uncoffined bones would have been left to bleach, in some quiet corner of that far off country. Though his memory would have been cherished in his father's heart, it would have been forgotten by his master.

When he saw his real condition, he was convinced that what was to be done could most properly be done then. He did not say, "another time

will be more convenient, and will suit my purpose better: I, therefore, will defer my journey." If he had, as we observed a moment since, he would have lived an exile from his father's family, and died an unknown and unpitied beggar, in a distant country. That convenient season would never have come; and a dreamy existence, of what might have been his future, would have been all that he could ever enjoy.

Do you not think that the prodigal, after he became again a resident of his father's house, and a member of his father's household, often had his heart filled with joy, that he was thus able *immediately* to practice that upon which he had resolved?

To this part of the prodigal's history, my impenitent friends, would we call your most earnest attention. It is replete with most important instruction. In truth there is nothing which has

a greater personal interest to those who are journeying to the grave and to the judgment-seat.

If putting our resolution into effect, be the hinge upon which our eternal happiness or misery turns, putting it into immediate execution, is a hinge within the other. It is around this point, that the difficulties centre of becoming a Christian. It is not that you do not resolve; it is that you do not carry your resolution *immediately* into effect. It is not that the Spirit does not strive; it is that you tamper with these gracious strivings. It is because you keep resolving, and deferring, that you are in danger of missing heaven.

IMMEDIATELY, how great the meaning! In this respect, it is a "volume in a word." To how many is the term in the other world fraught with most mournful memories. To how many is it the scorpion's sting. To how many is it the gall which they must drink, through the long rayless

night of eternal death, shut up in their gloomy residence. IMMEDIATELY! My friends, it were easy to conceive, that there is many a vacant seat in Paradise, many a harp without an owner, and many a long flowing robe of white hanging in the wardrobe of the great King, because of not escaping immediately from the cities of the plain, and fleeing to the place of refuge which Jesus has kindly provided. So I can readily imagine, that there is many a prodigal returned—many a wanderer brought home—many an exile welcomed to his father's door; and, Oh, how many who shall be radiant gems in the mediatorial crown of Jesus, because that, at once, they carried the resolution into effect, by starting in their pilgrimage for the Celestial City.

I went to the old man of venerable appearance and of trembling form, who was traveling in the road to death. I asked him why it was, that, as his journey was nearly ended, he was not a pilgrim

of Zion. And with a trembling voice and deep solemnity, he said it was because he did not step into the pool *while* the water was troubled, Carefully I went to the bedside of the dying Christian, and as he was calmly and sweetly breathing away his life, I asked him of his past, his present, and his future. He said that, under God, the improvement of the present was all that saved him. Because immediately he arose and went to his Father, was the only reason why he indulged the hope of one day becoming a resident of the Christian's home in glory.

My friends, we can bring witnesses to the worth of the present from the gloomy chambers of the dead, and from the pleasant courts of the bright world beyond the visible heavens. We can appeal for its worth to the hoary-headed sinner, and to him of silvery locks found in the way of righteousness. Evidences of its great importance gather around the death-bed of the sinner, and of the child of grace.

We suppose, my friends, that there is not one in this assembly who has not been convicted of sin ; who has not had the Spirit to strive with him. It is as much our privilege as it was the prodigal's, to return home.

In looking over those before me, I see some who have returned to their Father ; but more who have not. Upon what principle will you account for it, other than not immediately closing with conviction ? While convinced as to your duty, you kept deliberating, and arguing the point with yourselves, until the Spirit departed, and conviction ceased. When do you expect to arise and go to your Father ? When do you expect to be perfectly ready ? What conviction do you intend to improve ?

In this case, as well as in others, it is proper to judge of the future by the past. Judging by the past, when do you think the season will come

when you will be all prepared to resolve and carry your resolution immediately into effect? Do you not think, that the same delay, and indecision, and tampering, will attend your future convictions that have attended your past? Will not the same arguments that have triumphed over you once, conquer you again? Do you not know that he who gives way to one temptation, is the more easily overcome when he endeavors to resist the second? So he, who for years has been resolving, and never acting, has but uncertain ground of confidence that he will faithfully attend to the matter in the future?

The truth is, my friends, the longer you act with this irresolution, the harder you will find it to do differently. Judging by the past, you know that when your next, and next conviction shall come, you will be no more ready than you are now. Besides, there is danger in delay. It is hazardous to trifle with the strivings of the Spirit.

It is perilous to trifle with the sacred things of God. Do you not know, that if you ever become Christians, you must go to Jesus? Why not go *now*, as well as at some indefinite time in the future.

It is wonderful, that when the pearl of great price is within your reach, you will hesitate to take it. It is astonishing, that you are content to travel in the road to death, when heaven and all its glories might be yours. It is sad, that you are content to be wanderers in a far country, when your Father would take you into his household, and encircle you in his arms. Had the prodigal deferred his return, till through weakness he was unable to perform the journey, the remaining days of his life would have been filled with sorrow and bitter regrets. If you defer repentance too long, it will overshadow the closing hours of life with trouble and terrible forebodings of the future.

Think of all the prodigal's return did for him ;

that it restored him to his father's household, and to his father's arms, and filled his last days with happiness. Go thou and do likewise. As he returned to his home, so do you return to that of which his was only a type. As was the case with him, so shall it be with you. Your closing hours will be calm, and heaven will open all its glories to you, when you shall have seen the last of earth.



THE RECEPTION.

LUKE, 15 : 20.

“ BUT WHEN HE WAS YET A GREAT WAY OFF, HIS FATHER SAW HIM, AND HAD COMPASSION, AND RAN AND FELL ON HIS NECK AND KISSED HIM.”

THE Bible, is wonderfully, the book for the fallen. There is not a truth which it contains, that is not applicable, at some time or another, during our pilgrimage. Not only does it teach us our duty, but it so truthfully sets before us human nature in its various phases, that we may be ever learning.

The parable, upon which, for successive Sabbath evenings we have meditated, is a striking exemplification of the principle of which we speak—its adaptation to man in all the relations which he sustains. The vastness of Bible knowledge is

wonderful. Though studying its truths from a different stand-point, still they are attractive.

In this parable the scene is changed, yet is it profitable to study. Previously the son has been the actor, and we have seen him, in different guises and in various situations. In all, however, his example has been beneficial, and his sad experience of inestimable worth. We have learned lessons from his entire history, upon which we may meditate with profit, till the closing hour of life. As in a mirror, he has shown us our wanderings; and, like Christian in his pilgrimage, he has marked out the way, by which we must return.

Now, however, the scene is changed; and the father is brought more prominently before us. The father's actions are rendered the more interesting, in that we may see in them the actions of our heavenly Father toward us. A thousand considerations tend to render this subject deeply in-

teresting. As we have wandered from our Father's household, as we need his forgiveness before we can be happy, must not everything connected with the parent's course toward his son, be hailed with satisfaction, and the liveliest joy.

To the exile, no name is so interesting and dear as home. To the captive no theme is so pleasant, and so delightful as freedom. To the criminal every subject is dull when compared with pardon. We are exiles far from home. We are captives bound with fetters. We are criminals, sentenced to everlasting death. Is not that, which tells us how we may again get home; which puts into our hands the key that unlocks our fetters; which obtains for us our reprieve from eternal death, deeply important? It is. There is nothing with which you you can compare it, that will not show its worth the more.

To-night we dwell upon that subject. You re-

quire not to be told, that the father's receiving the wayward but penitent son, is a beautiful and impressive image of our Father opening his arms to the returning sinner; affectionately inviting him to recline upon his bosom, that thus he may find a refuge from the terrors of the law, and the trouble of conscience. We can then, with reason, ask your very serious attention, as we dwell upon the prodigal's reception by his father.

We remark:

First.—That his father received him *willingly*. This is evident from the words, “But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion on him.” These words show the very flower of willingness. They show a bosom alive to the kindest emotions of the human heart. The parent did not wait for the son to come, and with humble confessions, and with solemn promises, beg that he would again receive him into his household. He did not upbraid him for the life

he had lived, and for the mournful depth to which, in consequence, he had fallen. But he ran to meet him, folded him in his arms, and kissed away the tears that were running down his pale, thin face. How beautiful—how affecting—how suggestive, the first interview between the father and his repentant son.

In your imagination, picture a long, wide, straight avenue; at one end of which, by a primitive mansion, stands a benign countenanced and venerable man. As he stands thus, thinking perhaps of his absent son, his attention is attracted by something distant coming slowly toward him. It approaches, and he ascertains it to be a man. He looks with steadfast gaze upon the approaching traveller, and discovers him to be a man, thin, emaciated, and all in rags. He advances nearer, and the old man recognizes the features of his long absent, but ever remembered son, in that forlorn, and wretched, wandering beggar. And

simultaneously with the recognition, are brought into activity the kindly feelings of his heart.

He did not wait for his child to approach, but heedless of the distance, and unmindful of his age, he *ran* to meet him. You could not think of anything, that would heighten the beauty of the picture, and make it more precious to the wandering sinner. How perfectly natural it is. When the recognition takes place, paternal feelings having the ascendancy in the father's bosom, he runs to meet his child. While the son, on the other hand, filled with shame for his conduct, and doubtful whether he shall be received and pardoned, comes with slow and hesitating step. The father, as if divining his thoughts, runs as fast as he can to meet him, that he may put an end to his doubts, and remove all his perplexities. And when at length they met, in that broad avenue, there was no word of reproach spoken, and no indications of wishes ungratified, and of feelings wounded.

The past was forgotten in present joy, and the proud departure was merged in the penitent return. He fell upon his neck and kissed him. How touchingly beautiful—how thrillingly eloquent!

This tender reception is really the *point* of the parable, which Jesus wished to impress upon the minds of his auditors. And who shall say, that He did not do it well? Who could blame that father for receiving his son? Who, then, could be dissatisfied with Jesus, for pardoning the returning sinner?

This part of the prodigal's history, my impenitent friends, to you is replete with instruction. It teaches one of the most precious truths to be found in the Bible. It has brought comfort to many who were disconsolate. And there are none whom it does not encourage to hope. In the father's running, and having compassion on his son, and folding him in his arms, you have a most

expressive figure, to show the willingness of the Saviour, to receive all who will come unto Him. Did the father stand with open arms to receive his repentant son? So the Redeemer stands with open arms, and a generous, loving heart, and says, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink; if any man weary, let him come unto me and rest." He will willingly receive all, not as hired servants, but as sons and daughters. "Come, and I will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters. Come, and your sins and your transgressions shall be remembered no more, and your iniquities shall all be blotted out."

It is one of the recommendatory features of the Gospel, that it makes known the Saviour's readiness to receive all who come to Him, with broken and contrite hearts. In what age or clime has it happened that any were desirous of coming to the Saviour, whom the Saviour was not willing to accept? Who ever properly sought, who did not

find? Who ever earnestly knocked at the door of mercy, to whom that door was not willingly opened? The dying thief, who hung beside the Saviour on Calvary, was anxious to return, and the suffering Saviour was willing to receive him. Persecuting Saul came, and though his hands were stained with the blood of the martyred Stephen, he was kindly and willingly accepted. Mary Magdalene, from whom seven devils were cast, was not coldly repulsed; but being graciously received, with heaven upon her countenance, and with glory in her heart, she sat, a meek and lovely learner, at her Redeemer's feet. Peter, who with curses, denied his Master in the judgment Hall, was fully and tenderly forgiven. David, with a double sin upon his heart, was taken again into favor. Some, who to-night in glory, wear the whitest robe, and the most radiant crown, and who occupy the highest seats in the heavenly synagogue, were taken from the lowest dens of

infamy and vice ; yet Jesus kindly welcomed them ; the Saviour is willing to receive the penitent sinner.

It cannot be otherwise, while the economy of the Gospel remains as it is. Every word that the Redeemer uttered teaches it. Every act that He performed, from the moment that He laid aside His sceptre and His crown, in His own peculiar habitation, till He went up, as the peerless conqueror of death, to take them up again, shows it as distinctly as if written with a sun-beam. On this point, there cannot be the shadow of a doubt. For us He gave His back to the smiter, and His body to the cross. For our return He stands watching, till the cold night wind has chilled His frame, and the dew-drops hang from His locks.

We remark :

Second.—That his father received him *tenderly*. This is evident from the words, “had compas-

sion on him, and ran, and fell on his neck." It was much to have looked upon him with the eye; more to have taken him by the hand; but, most of all, to fall upon his neck. "The delicateness of the meeting scenes, proves this to have been true. Tenderness, certainly, there was! That, though guilty and deserving to be beaten, though dirty, and newly come from feeding swine, he would take him into his arms and lay him upon his bosom." His poverty, his rags, his dirt, and his misdemeanors, were all forgotten and forgiven; and the warmth of his reception was so great, that, long unused to kindness, he was quite overcome.

If you think of all the circumstances, you shall find that there was much that might have made the father hesitate before giving his consent, even to his son's return. And when you think that, when poor, and pale, and ragged from his excesses, his father saw him, and ran to meet him, and

instead of upbraiding him for his conduct, fell upon his neck and kissed him, you cannot but see that compassion filled his bosom.

There are many things connected with the reception, that render it apparent that it was wonderfully kind, and touchingly tender. We are accustomed to think that there was something very touching, in the meeting between the patriarch Jacob and his illustrious son. So, indeed, there was. But Joseph was the son of Jacob's old age, and his favorite child. Instead of going voluntarily from home, he had been torn away by treachery. Through the long years of painful slavery, he had so demeaned himself as to win the respect of men, and the approbation of God. And when at length he set out from Pharoah's court, it was to meet one greatly his inferior in station.

While Jacob felt that, in beholding his son, he should look upon his preserver; and one whom

God had raised up for Pharoah, to "bind his princes at his pleasure, and teach his senators wisdom." It could not well have been otherwise, that when at length they met, upon the beautiful plains of Goshen, a thousand memories should come into the bosoms of father and son, to render the first interview of long and eventful years, pregnant with the tenderest emotions. When they lifted up their voices and wept, it was just what we should have expected. When the patriarch clasped his long lost, but ever remembered son, in his withered arms, and bedewed his face with the tears of parental love, we feel that it was perfectly natural.

But how different from this was the case before us. Instead of the prodigal's having done nothing to wound the heart of his father, he had done everything. Instead of having risen to eminence, he had sunk to a mournful and base obscurity. Instead of riding in a chariot, clothed with royal

robes, and attended by a numerous retinue, he came on foot and alone, and in rags and poverty. Instead of being a comfort, he was a discomfort ; instead of being an honor, he was a dishonor. He had done everything to bring the gray hairs of his father with sorrow to the grave. Tenderness of heart, is never shown anywhere on this cold earth, if it did not well up in the bosom of that old man, as he ran and fell upon the neck of his wandering but repentant son.

My impenitent friends, this part of the narrative to you is rich with instruction. In the tenderness of the meeting, between the father and the son, you have an image of the tenderness of another meeting, which takes place between the weary and heavy-laden sinner, and Jesus Christ, the sinner's friend. It is thus, that Jesus will receive the repentant sinner. He will take him into his household, and adopt him as his child. He will confer upon him a blissful immortality.

Though it may almost surpass human belief, numberless are the attestations to the fact, that though the sinner comes from his mournful wanderings, covered with the leprous spots of moral defilement, Jesus will receive him with a tender heart. He will joyfully receive the wanderer in his arms. He will take the burden from his shoulders, and remove the load from his heart. Jesus will never break the bruised reed; He will never quench the smoking flax. His heart is all tenderness toward those whom He left his bright home to save. With what exquisite tenderness does Jesus receive back his erring creatures!

They may have wandered long, and, like the prodigal, reached the lowest depths of vice, yet they are kindly invited, and tenderly received. He will not turn a single applicant away. Sweet-robed mercy will whisper forgiveness into their ear, and assure them of a hearty welcome. The Saviour will remove their transgressions from

them, as far as the East is from the West. Oh, say, is there tenderness anywhere to be compared with this!

I would not serve a master, who will never reward but with imprisonment and death. I would not be the object of hard-heartedness and cruelty, when I might be kindly regarded by the God who is love. I would not remain in a far country, with none to love me, when I might return home and be the child of heaven's King. I would not live upon the barren husks of this world, when it was my privilege to eat of angel's food.

We remark :

Third.—That his father received him *affectionately*. This thought is contained in the words, “and he kissed him.” To run from his house to meet him, was an evidence of willingness. To fall upon his neck, and lay him upon his bosom saw an evidence of tenderness. But to kiss him

was a manifestation of love. A kiss is a token of affection; and giving him this, was at once a pledge of friendship, reconciliation, and love. The father could not have done more to show his son that all his past offences were forgiven and forgotten. 'Twere indeed a comfort, such as mortals seldom have, to meet with such a reception after such a departure.

We know that the toils and trials of many a dark hour, would be entirely forgotten, could the earthly wanderer now be encircled in arms of such changeless affection. We have often propounded the question to ourselves, whether it were possible for the parent to have shown more real love for the son who had voluntarily exiled himself from the home of his childhood; and when he had nowhere else to go, had returned covered with dishonor and with ignominy, with rags and with dirt. Wonderful love! Drawn to the bosom and most tenderly kissed. Must not

the prodigal have known from this, that there yet was room for him in his father's household, and a place for him in his father's heart?

For you, my impenitent friends, this feature of the prodigal's reception, is most suggestive and encouraging. It renders apparent, one of the most precious truths to be found in the Bible; a truth for which you and I shall be humbly but joyfully grateful, if ever we are residents of the celestial city.

In the father's falling upon the neck and kissing his ragged and unworthy son, you have a beautiful figure to set forth the affectionateness of the meeting between Christ and the returning sinner. There is one difference. The tender love with which Jesus receives the penitent, is infinitely greater than that with which the father received his son. He too, on your return, will "kiss you with the kisses of his mouth." Notwithstanding

your moral defilement, he will lay you upon his bosom, and love you with an everlasting love. The Saviour has given every proof that he will lovingly take you back again, when you return from your wanderings and go home.

There could not be anything more touching than the affection that He shows, toward the weary and heavy-laden sinner. Mercy never looks half so lovely, as when she stoops down, to whisper into the ear of the despairing penitent, the word "forgiveness." Jesus' love is boundless; "it is a sea that no line can fathom—it is an ocean without a shore." And its greatness is never made so manifest as when the wanderer returns to his God.

Is it nothing to be thus received by the Saviour? Is it nothing, when you have been wandering upon the dark mountains of sin, to know that there is a home to which you can go, and a kind, tender Friend who will love you? Who will

crown you with his kindness, notwithstanding your unworthiness, and fill your hearts with a peace of which the world knows nothing?

Jesus stands, with open arms and a generous bosom, and kindly invites you to come. Will you not accept his invitation and return, that you may experience your Father's kindness in this world, and your Father's love in the next?



AT HOME AGAIN.

LUKE, 15 : 22, 23, 24.

“BUT THE FATHER SAID TO HIS SERVANTS, BRING FORTH THE BEST ROBE, AND PUT IT ON HIM; AND PUT A RING ON HIS HAND, AND SHOES ON HIS FEET.

“AND BRING HITHER THE FATTED CALF, AND KILL IT; AND LET US EAT, AND BE MERRY :

“FOR THIS MY SON WAS DEAD, AND IS ALIVE AGAIN; HE WAS LOST, AND IS FOUND.”

WE come, this evening, to dwell upon the last subject contained in this interesting parable—the prodigal at home again! It were easy to imagine the treatment which he would receive, after his tender reception. It may almost be deemed a work of supererogation, to dwell upon that which we all feel must be so. But, because there is something so pleasant in the contemplation, we love to contemplate it. Because

there is something so suggestive and precious to man, in the father's subsequent treatment of his son, we feel it to be well worthy of deep and prayerful study.

The condition of the prodigal, when an exile from home, seemed the more sad, because of the striking and painful contrast with his early years. And now, when he has again returned to his father's house, and to his father's bosom, the change in his circumstances is only the more apparent, because of his sad experience when in a distant country. We think of him, then, ragged, and lonely, and sad, and hungry, standing by his swine, and in the bitterness of his soul exclaiming, "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger." We think of him now, seated at the festive board; partaking of the fatted calf; with shoes upon his feet; with a clean robe upon his shoulders, and with the ring upon his finger. We

love to muse upon the picture, in that it is so significant. We feel ready to invoke the choicest mercies to rest upon the father, for his kindness and love to the son who had so often grieved him. We feel willing to rejoice for the son's sake, that he has seen the error of his ways ; sought his early home, and found a resting-place from all his troubles.

When we think that the wanderer has returned, and that the long-lost son has been folded to his father's bosom, we see before us something more than a young man returning home, and his father willing to forgive him. As we have hinted, in all this we can see a prefiguration of a more important return, and of a larger and nobler forgiveness. It brings before us that sad hour, when transgression barred the gates of Eden against the guilty pair. It brings before us that memorable night, when angels announced to the wondering shepherds of Bethlehem that the Saviour

was born. It brings before us, too, that bright hour for the destinies of our race, when the sepulchre was unlocked,—when its fetters were broken,—when its power was vanquished,—and when the poor sinner's Friend ascended to glory, and prepared, as he ascended, a passage way to his throne; and, by every means that infinite love could suggest, urged the wanderer into it, that thus he might be saved.

To proceed to the more immediate consideration of the subject of the evening,—the prodigal at home again,—we are led to remark :

First.—That the father treated his son with *respect*. When you think upon all, you hardly need to be told that this is so. It is evident from the words, “ But the father said to the servants, bring forth the best robe and put it on him.” The Jews were accustomed to wear two garments, or perhaps, we should say, robes. The one worn

ordinarily, the other on extraordinary occasions ; both fastening with a girdle around the waist.

By the best robe, here, is meant the outer garment worn only on festive occasions, and by princes and great men. Such an one, were the servants commanded by the father to put upon the son. He was a beggar before, but now he would make him a prince. That he did so, proves conclusively that he treated him with consideration.

Had he given him shelter and food ; had he attired him in coarse and homely garments, no one but must say, he was well treated. When, however, he came in his miserable plight,—with tattered clothes,—with blood shot eyes,—with swollen feet ; and half famished from his frequent and long abstinences, to put upon him the robe which the mighty men and the chief captains wore, to say the least, in all the circumstances, was showing him very much attention.

You cannot think of anything that took place between them that does not render this apparent. The servants were not allowed to taunt him upon his past beggary and degradation; and the father observed the greatest delicacy, in every word that he uttered, and in every act that he performed. In all his intercourse toward him, he blended the dignity of the gentleman with the kind and tender manner of the parent.

From this part of the prodigal's history, impenitent friends, you can learn much that is profitable. It is filled with instructive and useful lessons, that are available for comfort, down to the closing hour of life. It is one of the recommendatory traits of the Gospel of the Son of God, that it renders this great truth distinct, that though the sinner, by his previous conduct, is totally unworthy, yet when he returns as a lowly penitent, with rags upon his person, and is desirous of becoming a member of the Saviour's household, he

will be treated with the greatest possible respect. The Redeemer will take from him the tattered and filthy garments of his own merit, and will clothe him in a seamless and spotless robe, dyed in the blood of Calvary ; a robe that will permit him to sit down in this wilderness, at the table upon which is spread the gospel feast ; and that will enable him, amid the palm-groves of the heavenly Canaan, to sit down, at the same board, with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and with the countless number of whom the world was not worthy—a robe worn by philosophers, and by statesmen, by counsellors and by kings ; by everyone who shall be made a king and a priest unto God, and wear a crown within the limits of the glorious inheritance.

In every sense, the Saviour's dealings with the returning wanderer will be most considerate. His sins and iniquities shall be remembered no more. He will treat him as kindly as if he had never sin-

ned ; in truth, as if he had always done all that was required of him. It is much to be permitted to come. It is more to have the promise that our previous lives shall never influence His mind to our injury.

My friends, in such circumstances, is it nothing to be kindly and tenderly noticed by the Master ? Is it nothing to be the objects of his regard, undiminished in time or in eternity ? Is it nothing to have a guarantee of being honorably treated by his family, here and hereafter ? Is it nothing, when you think how often you have grieved him ; how often you have done that which he has positively forbidden ; how, almost daily, you have trampled upon his most sacred requirements, to be generously and fully forgiven ? Is it nothing, when by sin you have journeyed into a distant land, and lost everything that you could call your own ; that returning, covered with rags, you should have such a beauteous robe put upon you,

and be treated with so much consideration? Is all this nothing? It is everything to man, bound to eternity, and the judgment seat.

To have forgiveness, and a shelter, and food, and royal robes, and an everlasting home, where there is always enough and to spare, is more than you deserve, and more than any one, save Jesus, would do for you.

We remark :

Second.—That the father treated his son with *kindness*. This is evident from the words, “put a ring on his hand.” Among orientals, and especially among the Jews, to wear a ring on the hand was a mark of dignity and wealth. “The rich, and those in office, commonly wore them.” The putting of a ring upon the prodigal’s finger, by his father, therefore, was a special mark of favor. Indeed, it was an evidence of distinction conferred upon a favorite. Here it was expressive of

the kindness, which the father entertained for his son; and the favor into which he received him. To disrobe him of his worn-out garments, and to put upon him a beauteous robe, was much. But it was more—a greater mark of distinction—to place upon his finger the signet ring.

You must feel that there was some difference between the swine-feeder, in a far country, and the young man at home again, attired in garments worn by the mighty and the honorable; with a ring upon his hand, that the wealthy and the chief captains wore.

That ring; what did it say to him? It told him that though for a season he had been friendless, feeding upon the charities of a selfish world, yet now he had a friend who would remain true to his interests amid innumerable changes. It said to him, that though by his prodigality he had lost much, yet more was in reserve for him. That

he need have no apprehension for the future. That when sickness came, he should have a pillow for his aching head; and one to watch by his couch of pain. Of what was that ring not to him an earnest and a pledge? Symbolically, yet to him, in language easy to be understood, it was an evidence of perfect restoration, and an assurance that he should be the object of his father's kindness, and affection, and love. Beautiful picture! We may study it with profit, so long as we live.

My impenitent friends, look and receive encouragement and instruction. You, when you return to the Saviour, shall receive greater kindness at His hands, than that, of which to the repentant son, the father's ring was a pledge. We would not attempt to spiritualize this image. We may, however, draw from it the important truth, that God will treat the returning sinner with the greatest respect, as well as with the tenderest kindness.

That He will be more to him than the father could possibly be to the prodigal.

My friends, do you tremblingly and doubtingly ask, "can this be true?" "Will Jesus treat me kindly, after all I have done to grieve him? Will he give me all that, of which, to the prodigal, the ring was a pledge? Will he so deeply and so strongly love me?" He will. There is not one, among all the members of the household of faith, whether now on earth, or whether already gone to walk the beautiful streets of the celestial city; who did not, or who does not, experience infinite kindness from his Elder Brother.

I love to tell you of the kindness of Jesus as a friend. He who, in the days of His flesh, went as a sympathizing mourner, and stood by Mary's and by Martha's side, as together they wept by their brother's grave; He who stood upon the hill-top above Jerusalem, in the sweet, calm hour of

twilight, and in the fulness of His heart breathed out a prayer for the city that He loved, which for beauty and sublimity has never had an equal, is still the same *kind* Friend that He was in the days of His flesh, as He journeyed on His errands of mercy, over the vine-clad hills of His beloved Palestine. Though he has gone up again to take His seat, amid the rejoicings of an innumerable company, who stand round about His throne, yet is it true that

“ Our Fellow-Sufferer yet retains
A fellow-feeling of our pains,
And still remembers, in the skies,
His tears, His agonies, and cries.”

The giving of the ring, by the father, was beautifully and touchingly emblematical. It told of an affection that should last as long as life. But humanity is not capable of a love as deep, as strong, and as lasting as the Saviour's. What is so good and so great a gift in this world, as a *true friend*? One who will rejoice with us in our joys,

and whose tears will flow with ours, in seasons of sadness and grief; one who will never take advantage of our circumstances, and who will love us none the less if we sometimes err; one upon whom we feel that we can always, with safety, depend? What a jewel is such a friend. Yea, what a diadem, set with gems that sparkle like the diamond on the brow of darkness. Such a friend is Jesus. "For, as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him."

As the ring upon the prodigal's finger was a pledge of deathless friendship, so is the friendship of Jesus. It is without end. Coldness cannot weaken it. It burns just as brightly, amid the most pinching poverty, as it does in the marble halls of senators and kings. It will be just as tender in the hard hour of dying; and there will be no change, amid the august assemblage of the judgment day. Whom Jesus once loves He will love unto the end. We remark:

Third.—That the father treated the prodigal *as a dear son*. This is evident from the entire parable. But especially, from the following words: “Bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found.” The fatted calf, that had been reserved for some special occasion, was killed and prepared; and the son, with his beauteous robe, with his signet ring, and with his shoes, sat down in the banqueting hall, to partake of the feast, amid happiness and joy. Think you not that there was gladness in his heart, and that he blessed the hour when, a poor, ragged, and half-starved swine-feeder in his master’s field, in a far country, he came to himself, and resolved to return to his father?

Doubtless the trials of the past were forgotten, in the enjoyment of the present. His must have been a lofty column that gratitude raised; and the

letters upon it must have been deeply carved, traced by the hand of thankfulness!

In that household there was happiness, and in the father's heart there was real joy. A little time before, sorrow sat upon his countenance, the tear stood in his eye, and the heavy sigh that broke from his bosom, told that memories of the past came mournfully to his recollection. Now, just as his sun was about to set, amid clouds and darkness, suddenly the bow appeared. The clouds parted. His sun went down in undimmed beauty. And even the twilight of death was rendered softly lustrous, by the serenity of its departing rays.

Once more, impenitent friends, look and receive instruction from this heavenly parable. You can see, in this feature of the prodigal's treatment by his father, one illustration of your heavenly Father's treatment of you, when you become members of his household. "I will be a Father unto

you, and you shall be my sons and daughters," is His gracious language. A kind, tender, and loving Father will he be. In all respects He will treat you as dear children. Think not, my friends, that you can measure the Saviour's love. It is fathomless. It reaches from one boundary of the universe to another; and from this low earth to the centre of the throne where he sits.

The prodigal was taken all newly arrayed, and was seated at a sumptuous repast. If you conceive of this as a type of either this world or the next, how magnificently beautiful it is. When once you belong to Jesus, He will strip you of your ragged garments, and put upon you the seamless robe of His own righteousness. He will feed you upon the ordinances and the promises of His word and of His sanctuary. Thus he will lead you by still waters and in green pastures. He will continually be spreading a table for you, so long as you are dwellers in time.

Often will it occur, even though in an enemy's country, that your hearts shall be filled with a joy that the world is as powerless to give as to take away. It will not be, however, until you sit down to partake of the feast, to which the prodigal's and that of Gospel times, look onward; that the full force of these words shall be seen and felt. Then all the exiles of earth shall have been welcomed home; and all the wandering prodigals shall have reached the threshold of their Father's door. The robe which you wore, amid your scene of warfare, may be covered with the dust and the blood of battle. When, however, you have stepped from the chilling of Jordan waters, upon shores where the sunshine of heaven always sleeps, shining beings shall take off your worn garments, and put upon you a robe as spotless as the Father's throne, and as beautiful as his own home. With this upon your shoulders; with a crown, radiant with immortality, upon your heads, and with the palm

of the conqueror in your hands, you shall be conducted across the vestibule into the Banqueting Hall. What a garnished apartment! A golden floor, clear as glass—with walls of jasper—and with pearly windows;—the light no-where seen, yet filling that vast temple, as brilliantly as if lighted by a thousand suns.

We wish that we could tell you of the company that shall be congregated there, to sit down together at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. There is Moses, risen from that unknown grave, where his Maker buried him amid the solitudes of Pisgah. Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob are there, from the cave of Machpelah, where their honored dust rested so long. There, too, is a long line of Patriarchs, and a noble band of Martyrs. Doubting Thomas is there; and by his side stands the bold and impulsive Peter. Stephen, the lamb-like martyr, is there; and leaning upon his bosom is Saul of Tarsus, who once held the garments of

his murderers. John, the lone exile of Patmos, is there ; and seated by his side is Henry Martyn, from his humble sepulchre underneath the walls of Tocat. Mary, the weeping mourner at the Saviour's tomb, in the early gray of the morning, is there ; and leaning upon her, with sisterly affection, is Harriet Newell, from her lone grave on the Isle of France.

The father's joy was so great, we are told, that when they sat down to partake of the fatted calf, there was music. Thus shall it be with you, when you are seated with your Father, in the magnificent residence which he has prepared for all his children. "I heard," said John, "the voice of harpers, harping with their harps. And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders : and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth." Must it not, then, be true, that, in

your case, as well as in the prodigal's, there shall be genuine happiness?

Now, impenitent friends, it only remains for us once more to ask, "Will you not do as the prodigal did? Arise and go to your Father, that you may secure His protection and His love here, and be permitted, through grace, hereafter to sit down in His beautiful home, as members of his family, to enjoy His hospitality and presence forever?"







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